Modelling Godly Character

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[0:00] jobs that no one else wanted to do. Jobs like rattle snake catcher, roadkill collector, shark attack suit tester, maggot farmer, spider venom collector, and septic tank cleaner.

The show's main message was that work is good, even dirty jobs. Work with dirty jobs was good, and Mike, the host, said that he had, in fact, witnessed many people doing all kinds of odd and dirty and hard work and yet enjoying it. And that rings true with the message that I preached last week about the dignity of all work, because each one of us has been assigned our vocation by God to work out his purposes in this world. When you watch the show, though, it's obvious that while there are many positive aspects with the dirty jobs that Mike trials, there's also the negatives in some of the work. Like when he listed the requirements for roadkill collector, the negatives were that you need to be able to brave on oncoming traffic, especially if the roadkill was not quite dead yet and you needed to dispatch it or something. And also, you need to have a strong stomach.
Like, the positive is that you get to work outdoors. Now, I'm not sure if the positive ultimately outweighs the negatives in those sort of work, but anyway. But it doesn't matter whether whatever your frontline is, whether it's at home, it's in a classroom, it's on a factory floor, it's in a national park, in an office cubicle. Work can be a source of great purpose and dignity, but also a source of great frustration in our lives. Dealing with difficult customers, a demanding boss, inclement weather, a family's mountain of laundry, a two-year-old, an elderly parent, lingering unemployment, underemployment, overemployment. It can all be a huge pain.
And so it's pretty important for Christians, I think, to understand and to hold in tension both what the Bible says about creation, as we looked at last week, and what it says about the fall and the destructive consequences of sin. That is, it's important to hold in tension both the dignity of work and the difficulty of work, the dignity of our vocation, where God's put us, and the difficulty of our vocation. And that is why so many Christians inhabit the extremes of idealism and cynicism, or even ricochet between idealism and cynicism on a regular basis. Idealism says, through my work, my vocation, my station in life, I'm going to change the world. I'm going to make a difference, I'm going to accomplish something new, and I'm going to bring justice to this world. I'm going to do everything that previous generations did not do, and failed to do. So idealism is probably more prevalent amongst those who are younger amongst us. Cynicism says nothing really changes, don't get your hopes up, do what it takes to make a living, don't let yourself care too much, get out of it whatever you can. And so cynicism is probably prevalent amongst those who have got a few more runs on the board advancing in years amongst us. But either way, we can be jumping between the two. Christians have, through their hope in God's story of redemption for the world that he created a deep contentment that enables them to work with all their being and never be ultimately discouraged by the frustrating reality of this world. And our concern in this series is how, in this context of both purpose and difficulty, that we might pursue our vocation in line with Colossians 3. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you'll receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. That is, you are in the midst of your vocation, and with all the difficulties associated with it, still being able to look forward with hope, because God has a great eternal plan that he's working out through you. So how do we live out, Colossians 3, in the ordinary, of Monday to Saturday, even on front lines that make no reference to God whatsoever?
[4:59] And one way is to live lives transformed by Jesus on those front lines. That is to model godly character, our concern for tonight. Character, it's true, the character shines through in all that we do.

And in thinking about modelling godly character, I'm thinking about more than just being nice. I'm thinking about something that's much more than middle class, North Shore, nice values. I'm

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thinking something a lot more than just being Canadian and just being nice. I'm thinking something a bit more than just hovering around in the world with this divine grin on your face. Modelling godly character is so much more than just niceness, in the same way that real love is so much more than niceness.
Love requires courage, determination, and sacrifice. All the things that you husbands put into Valentine's Day today. Love, courage, determination, sacrifice.
Because there's a few... Oh, hang on, Valentine's Day? It's Valentine's Day, is it? Forgot that one. Don't worry, as I said this morning, I bought a $2 bag of heart-shaped chocolates, which my girls devoured before Nat got one. Galatians 5 says the godly character is the fruit of God working in our lives by His Spirit. Verse 22 in Galatians 5. Grab your Bibles, smartphones, as Sam said, whatever. Get to Galatians 5, verse 22. It's a list of traits that God is working out in His people. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Some paraphrase the list of this fruit as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, integrity, courage, humility, and self-control. Now, either way, it's a pretty daunting list. It's an impressive list. It's not an exhaustive list of all the things that God's working out on you, but it's pretty impressive and daunting. Love. It's the Christ-like reaction to malice. Joy. The Christ-like reaction to depressing and difficult circumstances. Peace as the Christ-like reaction to troubles and threats and anxiety. Patience as the Christ-like reaction to all that raises your blood pressure. Kindness as the Christ-like reaction to all who are unkind and cruel.
Goodness is the Christ-like reaction to bad people, naughty people, and bad behavior. Faithfulness is the Christ-like reaction to lies and distortions and untruths. Gentleness is the Christ-like reaction to anger. Self-control as a Christ-like reaction to every situation where you want the sinful nature to take over and lead. That's pretty daunting. It's not niceness. It's not what we're talking about. Now, my focus here is not to unpack each one of those, but to go much broader.
[8:28] I want to say two things, two things about the fruit of the Spirit with 12 to 15 sub-points under each thing. No, it's not quite true. Two things. The first is the fruit of the Spirit is about supernatural internal transformation by God and not external moral constraint. That's the first thing.

I'll unpack that in a minute. The second thing I'm going to say is that unless the fruit of the Spirit are growing together, then none of them are there in their supernatural form.
That's the two things. And then I'm going to talk about how do we grow under Spirit. Okay? So let's understand the Spirit, the fruits of the Spirit. So having listed the fruit in verse 22, at the end of verse 23, it says, against such things, there is no law. There's a list of the nine traits. And then it says, against such things, there is no law. And now that is pretty significant.
And so I need to explain what that little bit means just there. Imagine New South Wales Parliament passed the law against joylessness and anxiety. It is now against the law in New South Wales to be joyless and to be anxious. That would be pretty useless as a law. Because law is a form of moral constraint that is essentially negative in its nature. Law works to stop the results of a messed up heart, but it can't get into the inside and deal with the messed upness of the heart.
You see, a well-enforced law might stem the tide of murder, might even stamp out murder. But it can't reach in and get to the anger which is in a heart, which is the root of murder.
[10:51] Murder is the consequence of a problem in a heart. Against pride and anxiety and joylessness and fear and all the other root problems in your heart and my heart, law is useless. Law cannot get into the heart where the root problem is. And so it cannot constrain my heart.

The answer to that is in verse 24 and 25. The Holy Spirit. The Spirit can go where the law can't go. You see, the Holy Spirit and the law working together can constrain you externally, but only the Spirit can go internally and bring transformation in the root problem. Only the Spirit can deal with the internal problem of messed up heart. And the practical difference between the law and the Spirit is enormous. The difference between an external moral constraint of the law and the internal transformation, supernatural transformation of the Spirit is very significant. The British have a saying, no man is a hero to his valet. No man is a hero to his valet. Now I've watched Downton Abbey and so I know what a valet is. A valet is a wealthy man's personal male attendant who's responsible for his clothes, for his appearance, for his personal details like his bank accounts and running his bath and sponging his back. All sorts of stuff like that. What the saying means is that no matter how grand your public persona is, in private your valet sees warts and all. He sees what you truly are like and what you truly want to be. The valet sees the impatience, the selfishness, the irritability, the pettiness, the anxiety, the jealousy, the joylessness. And so no man is a hero to his

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valet because his valet sees what he's really like.
And what this means is that when you use the law to constrain a person morally, externally, you do it at the expense of joy and peace. Which themselves are two fruits of the Spirit, you might notice. Law externally constrains you from doing what you want to internally do. And so it constrains you and locks you to a position of joylessness and peacelessness.
Think about how you raise a child. You get them and you say to them, we don't want you to do this or this or this or this or this or this or this or this. And you had better not do it because firstly, you'll get caught.
[14:10] God will catch you, police will catch you or I will catch you. And secondly, you better not do it because what will people think of you?

And thirdly, you better not do it because you will end up despising yourself. You'll have no respect for yourself. How are we making kids moral at that point?
We're making them moral by nurturing joylessness and peacelessness and anxiety and insecurity. As the law establishes external moral behavior at the expense of inner joy and peace, it establishes fear and pride that reveals itself where the valet and only the valet and you see it.
Or your spouse, or your children, or your parents, or your team at work, or the people who know you the best. In the private place is where you find out whether you are morally constrained externally or you're supernaturally changed internally by the Holy Spirit.
Only the Spirit will go deep. Only the Spirit makes you in your most private place and private time a person of joy and calm and peace and mercy and love and patience and kindness and courage and humility.
[15:49] Or to put it another way, if you are not more of a hero to the people who know you the best, then you should probably have an alarm bell ringing right now.

That is, if you've got this great persona with some people, great guy, great at his work, and yet the people who know you the best don't regard you as a hero, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, should be going off right now.
So how are you getting on on the inside? Are you a hero to those who know you the best? Or do they laugh about you over drinks? That's a scary question, I know.
But it's going to get just slightly more scarier. Because the second thing to notice is that the fruit all come together. If they are not growing all together, they are not growing at all, at least in their supernatural form.
And I get that from verse 22. Notice the singular statement, the fruit of the Spirit is, and then goes on and lists nine traits. It doesn't say the fruits of the Spirit are.
[17:22] The outcome of the work of the Holy Spirit in your life is nine traits. They're not separable traits. They are dependent on each other. Interdependent.

The fruits of the Spirit are all aspects of the same thing. You can't be patient unless you're humble. You can't be kind with people unless you've got self-control. You can't have integrity with this group at work and this group at home unless you have tremendous amount of inner peace and security with Christ that just allows you to flourish wherever you are.
They have to be together. If they're not together then they're not there at all. It's important to grapple with this so that you can recognize and evaluate the work of the Spirit in your life.
The temptation here is to look at this list and to give our scores based on how many of these traits we think we're good at and how many we're kind of okay at and that one's not so good.
And so we give ourselves a score and go six out of ten or nine and that's pretty good. That's more than a pass mark so I must be okay. And that would be wrong.
[18:38] They are interrelated and so they must grow together. Now let me just take a little bit of pressure off. There can be some lag here where some are growing faster than others but they must all be growing.

That's not just Galatians. That's a thrust of it. See, long before Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche said that people followed moral behavior out of fear and pride and desire for power over other people, the Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13 that it's extremely possible for people to live a moral life without love as the foundation of that life.
That is out of self-interest. That is without a heart that's being changed by the grace and love of God.

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Now that's really important because it's pretty typical for people who are kind and gentle and diplomatic and just so empathetic not to be assertive, to be bold or to be courageous.
They might have gentleness but they lack probably the best translation in the list is faithfulness. They aren't good at confronting and courage.
[20:10] On the other hand, there are people who are very bold and assertive and directive but tend to be impatient. A little on the harsh side. They lack empathy. And in both cases, the character traits are more natural personality traits given by God, I acknowledge, rather than inner transformation of the spirit.

You see, if your gentleness and your diplomacy were coming out of a heart that's transformed by God and radically secure in His love, you would be bold because you wouldn't be afraid of anything or anyone because you know you're secure in Jesus.
And if that's not the case, then the gentleness and the diplomacy is most likely a natural temperamental sweetness, niceness.
Now, that's good. Good in people and good in certain circumstances, but in a significant part, it's most likely cowardly.
good for many people, but in a way, if your boldness and your directness were coming out of a heart that's transformed by God, radically secure in His love, you would be empathetic and gentle and kind.
[21:39] And so, if you're not, then the courage and the boldness and the assertiveness is most likely a natural temperament of assertiveness, good for many people and situations, but in a significant part, most likely arrogance.

All the traits of the fruit of the Spirit have to be there in order for any of them to be there in their supernatural God-transformed form.
We are only as spiritually mature as our weakest trait. So go to your weakest trait.
That's the level of the work of the Holy Spirit in your life. Now, some of us here are starting to feel a little uncomfortable, I hope.
As I was when I was putting this down on paper, go to your least, I mean, the best thing for me to do is to go and ask my valet, Nat, I mean, she's the person who knows me better than anyone else.
[22:49] She's not literally my valet, but please don't repeat that. But to go to her and say, which one do you think? And it's a scary thing for me to go to her and say, which one do you think?

I mean, she might come back and say, one. I mean, you know, we're starting to feel a little uncomfortable, and I expect that's not entirely bad. Let me help you out just a little bit here.
It's important to remember the growth in the fruit of the Spirit is gradual. Verse 19 says that the acts of the sinful nature are, and then it goes a bunch of lists, an action happens.
It's an action. It happens. I mean, some actions might take a bit longer, but it's an action. Fruit, on the other hand, is a character trait that builds. It grows. It comes slowly.
See, I've got a tomato plant over there in my garden, and I can't tell the difference between yesterday and today. I mean, I'm assuming it's growing because it's not dying yet, and it has grown over time, but I can't see it.
[23:53] I mean, I can stick a measuring stick against it, and I can see it happen, but it happens slowly, and I can't always see it working. And every so often, God puts a measuring stick against us, and we get to check our progress as to whether we're growing or not.

It might be that you faced a situation, a familiar situation to you that you faced 12 months ago, and you look at your response to it now compared to then, and you go, oh, that's different. I wouldn't have done that 12 months ago.
Measuring stick. You're actually growing at that point, and that's God's grace to us. The last sentence of verse 17 is comforting, I think.
Having talked about the sinful nature and the spirit, it says, they are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. And at the very least, it means that a person growing in the fruit of the spirit, growing in godly character, can routinely go through seasons where they are just giving into the sinful nature.
It seems like there's not progress whatsoever. Paul is assuming here that you will feel like you're not making progress. And more significantly, I want to say that if that is your wrestle, when you are wrestling with that, feeling like you're not growing in love or patience or gentleness or boldness, it is a sign of the spirit working in you.

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[25:18] So hang in there. So there are a few things, that's the spirit, work of the fruit of the spirit generally, and there's a few things about how we might grow the fruit of the spirit in such a way that become a hero to your valet.

notice 24, it says, verse 24, those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with his passions and desires. Since we live by the spirit, let us keep in step with the spirit.
The first thing is that we are to crucify the sinful nature. And what's mentioned here, what it means by that, is different from what it says in Galatians chapter 2 verse 20 and Romans 6.6, where we are united with Jesus through being crucified in his crucifixion and for our atonement for our sin.
This verse is referring to the work that we do, not the work that Jesus does, who are now united with Jesus. So it's very similar to Mark chapter 8 where Jesus says, you want to come follow me, take a big cross and follow me.
It's Jesus' very vivid speech for a life of self denial. And so here, the apostle Paul takes Jesus' call to take up our cross and follow him to its logical conclusion.
[26:39] He wants to make sure that as we take up our cross, we actually get to the point of execution. He wants to make sure that the execution of the sinful nature actually takes place.

So that's the first thing, we crucify the sinful nature, the work that we do. The second thing is that we live by the spirit. So let us keep in step with the spirit. The Holy Spirit works through means to crucify the sinful nature as well as to help us to keep in step with the spirit.
The Holy Spirit works through means, objective means of grace like the Bible, prayer, prayer, worship, Christian fellowship, as well as subjective means of grace where we open ourselves to being changed.
And, you know, things like we're thinking about where we are, listening, questioning, hearing the critique and admonition of others, examining our hearts, sharing our hearts, and weighing Christian brothers and sisters' response to our lives.
to put it simply, Paul is describing here, what he's describing is in crucifying the sinful nature and walking in step with the spirit is a life of repentance.
[28:12] That's what he's talking about. We are turning our back on one way, enabled by the Holy Spirit, we're turning our back on one way of life, and we're walking with the Holy Spirit into a new way of life. But mark this, note this, if you've kind of switched off a little bit, wake up at this point.

This is essential to this life of repentance, and it's this, rejoice in order to repent.
Notice the beginning of verse 24, very significant. If you've got your Bible, open it, notice the beginning of verse 24. It says, those who already belong to Jesus crucify the sinful nature.
Only those who are already His can crucify the sinful nature. Only those who belong, who know that they belong to Jesus, and I would suggest to the degree that they know that they belong to Jesus, and that they are secure in Jesus, they are safe in Jesus, will then crucify the sinful nature and His passions.
Only Christianity says that. Every other religion says that if you crucify the flesh, then you belong to God. If you do the right thing, then you'll be included.
[29:39] If you do, then you will be. And that's not how the Christian gospel works. Christianity says, if you be, then you will do.

If you understand that in Jesus, you already belong, you're already accepted, you are already His forever, you will crucify the sinful nature with joy.
There's that word joy back in there again. You will do it with joy. You see, there is a way of wounding the sinful nature with fear.
fear. Moral constraint feeds on fear. You had better stop that, Steve, otherwise God's going to get you and people are going to think you're stupid and you're really going to be kicking yourself in the backside.
That's fear. The only way to crucify the sinful nature, to truly repent, to walk in the spirit is with joy. It is looking to what God has already done for you.
[30:47] You see, the Christian's motivation to live a life of love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness and faithfulness and gentleness and self-control and humility and courage is the radical love that we receive from God.

Instead of saying to yourself, you had better stop that because God's going to get you, you say, you better stop that because you have a God who's already got you.

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A God who has gone for infinite lengths in order to never reject you and you're forgetting the joy that what he has given you in order to go after something that is just so less valuable than what you already have.
You see, if we're impatient with others, God doesn't so much say to us, stop it or I'm going to get you. he says, Steve, have you forgotten how patient I am with you?
One last thing about growing in the fruit of the Spirit and godly character. You're never going to grow by yourself as an individual consumer. All this, what I've talked about, walking with the Spirit, crucifying the sinful nature, all gets worked out in community.
[32:15] To be effective for God's glory on your front line, you need the Christian community. Notice verse 15. Sam read it out.

One verse sort of before the main focus. Verse 15, if you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you'll be destroyed by each other.
Notice verse 26. It's the last verse of this section we're looking at. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other. You see, Paul sees the community believers as the way that you're going to get all this done.
All this transformation, the crucifying of one and inner transformation of the Spirit. It's the Christian community, it's the place and the way that you're going to get it all done, and he sees that getting this done as the way to better Christian community.
The community of God's people is essential for growth in godly character, and that's why it's quite possible to be part of a local church, to sit in a pew, to not be relationally connected for decades, and not grow in the fruit of the Spirit.
[33:30] Get in a community group, if you want to grow in the fruit of the Spirit, at least as a starting point. In the frontline course that I've based this sermon series on, there's this little video clip telling the story of a Christian office assistant who has a real ogre as a boss, and the boss is bad tempered, the boss is irrational, makes every day a complete nightmare for this poor girl.

The office assistant regularly prayed for patience, strength, for character, and also prayed for the boss to change, that he wouldn't be such an ogre.
He didn't. He never changed. After three years of praying for support and change, she ended up walking away from that job feeling like she didn't make a difference.
The boss was still the same. She didn't make a difference. She walked away thinking that she had failed in modelling character, the Christian faith, in her workplace.
Three weeks after she quit, the person who replaced her rang up and said to her, it's incredible that you lasted for three years.
[34:48] I'm thinking of quitting after three weeks. This bloke's a nightmare. nightmare. She found out during the course of that conversation that she was known in the office as a person of great patience, integrity, and courage in the face of a difficult situation.

She walked away thinking she'd fail. She wasn't convinced she was growing in patience, in godly character. It's great to hear that because you might be in a similar situation where you're at work or you're at home, you're with a group of friends, you're with your neighbours, whatever your front line is, and you're wondering in fact whether God is even at work, at all, at work, through you.
You may get to the end of your day and feel that little has been done for the sake of the kingdom of God and for God's glory. And you think that because there's this battle raging within your own heart, between the sinful nature and the spirit, and you look at your results and you think that nothing's happening in the workplace, nothing's happening with my kids.
I just want to say to you that it doesn't mean that God is not at work. God is at work in the redemption of his world. And I want to say the fact is God has been at work in you.
If the fruit of the spirit is working in you at all, that fruit will be on display. And you're probably the last person who can see it.
[36:34] Because you're aware of the battle. All of this growth in the fruit of the spirit happens in the frustrations and the joy and the challenges of just another ordinary day.

It is no small thing to model Christian character that is being counter-culturally transformed by the spirit of God. And there will be a future day when all will be made new and God calls us to work towards that day.
Even if we don't immediately see the fruit of his work in our lives or in the world. But I suspect just like that young lady got a phone call one day and if you never get that phone call but one day at the

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end of time I suspect you'll be astonished by the way that God has used you for his glory and the joy of many people just by living out the inner transformation of our hearts in the ordinary circumstances of life.
Take courage, keep working on the fruit.

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